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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Iran: Nuclear Program
- [1](#)2. Mideast
- [1](#)3. Jonathan Pollard

Key stories in the media:

Major media (banner in The Jerusalem Post) reported that new satellite imagery released on Sunday by the Institute for Science and Imagery, a Washington-based think tank, indicated that Iran has expanded one of its uranium conversion sites at Isfahan and reinforced another at Natanz, possibly in preparation for an aerial bombing attack. Leading media cited London's The Sunday Times as saying that Tehran has trained 40,000 suicide bombers to attack British and American targets if Iran's nuclear sites are attacked. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post reported that a high-ranking IDF officer from Military Intelligence told the newspaper that the successful enrichment of uranium announced last week proved that diplomatic efforts to stop Tehran's race to the bomb had failed. On Sunday, the media (lead story in Maariv) reported on the anti-Israel convention held in Tehran with Palestinian participants, during which Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was quoted as calling Israel a "rotten, dried tree" that will be "annihilated by one storm." Leading media quoted Hamas political leader Khaled Mashal as saying at the meeting that Hamas will never recognize Israel. The media quoted Shimon Peres, No. 2 in Kadima, as saying that Ahmadinejad will end up like Saddam Hussein.

Leading media reported that over the weekend, the US blocked the draft of a Presidential Statement by the UN Security Council condemning Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. Ha'aretz wrote that the resolution, formulated by the Qatar and PLO missions to the UN, was the mildest of three such documents barred by the US last week.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz and Maariv cited an announcement made by the US Treasury Department on Friday, according to which US companies and citizens are barred from maintaining commercial ties with the Hamas-led PA, except in cases in which special authorization is given.

Israel Radio cited the East Jerusalem newspaper Al-Quds as saying that Egypt has conveyed to the Hamas-led PA government a clear message, according to which the Arab states intend to pressure the PA government to recognize Israel. The radio reported that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman likely conveyed the message in a meeting with Palestinian FM Mahmoud Zahar.

In its lead story on Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that on Friday, Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh leveled unprecedented criticism at Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas, accusing the "presidential institution" of trying to deny the elected Palestinian government its

powers and present it as lacking the ability to govern. Today, Ha'aretz quoted a senior Palestinian source as saying on Sunday that the Palestine Investment Fund (PIF), a major Palestinian financial body, which was transferred from the Palestinian cabinet to Abbas's office after the January elections, will only be able to finance PA employee wages for two to three months. The source was quoted as saying that the PIF has only USD 200-250 million in liquid assets. Israel Radio reported that Iran decided to grant the PA USD 100 million, double the amount Iranian FM Manuchehr Motaki pledged on Saturday. Israel Radio reported that the Karni crossing will be open this morning for transport of goods from and into the Gaza Strip.

Israel Radio reported on exchanges of fire between the IDF and Palestinians in Nablus this afternoon. The radio said that two Palestinians, including a 13-year-old boy, were wounded in the clashes.

On Sunday, several media (lead story in Hatzofe) echoed an IDF Radio story citing the belief of Israeli officials that when the chaos in the PA increases, the US will agree to release convicted spy Jonathan Pollard in exchange for the release of Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, who is serving time in an Israeli jail. Today, Ha'aretz wrote that the initiative is supported by Likud MK Gilad Erdan, chairman of the Knesset Lobby on behalf of Jonathan Pollard. Ha'aretz cited disclaims by US and Israeli officials of those reports. Today, The Jerusalem Post reported that Pollard's lawyer, Nitzan Darshan-Leitner, told the newspaper on Sunday that Pollard would not agree to be freed from his US prison in exchange for Barghouti.

Ha'aretz, Yediot, and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday, hundreds of settlers clashed with IDF soldiers and police officers in the West Bank, after the settlers violated a military ban on marching near Ramallah. Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that military police recently arrested two IDF troops on suspicion of firing at Palestinian farmers and Israeli volunteers during one of the clashes at Skali Farm in the Nablus region.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz on Sunday quoted Lebanese PM Fuad Siniora as saying Saturday that he would be asking President Bush to put pressure on Israel to pull out of the Sheba Farms area.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that Jerusalem police will bolster their presence this morning near the soccer field in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sur Baher in a bid to prevent a Hamas rally there. The radio quoted Hamas leaders as saying that the rally is of a religious, not political nature.

All media reported that the 17th Knesset, which comprises 41 new legislators, will open this afternoon. The media said that Ariel Sharon's chair in the Knesset plenum will stand empty during the swearing-in ceremony. Today, all leading media, except The Jerusalem Post, reported on divergences between the Kadima and Labor parties regarding the minimum wage, which Labor wants raised to USD 1,000 a month. Ha'aretz also cited Labor's belief that Kadima's political guidelines are too ambiguous. Yediot cited the belief of most senior police officials that Yisrael Beiteinu party leader Avigdor Lieberman, who is still under police investigation, is fit to serve as internal security minister. Yediot reported that AG Menachem Mazuz will oppose Lieberman supervising police officers investigating him.

On Sunday, Yediot quoted Sheikh Raed Salah, the head of the northern branch of Israel's Islamic Movement, as saying over the weekend that Jerusalem will be the capital of the Arab Caliphate.

1. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The Iranian nation, which, for the most part, wants economic prosperity while adhering to national pride, might pay the price of its leaders' bragging and hatred if it does not come to its senses and work to replace the current regime."

Block Quotes:

"The Noise Before the Storm"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 16): "The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has been gripped by a growing verbal momentum in the past few weeks.... This time, Ahmadinejad accused Israel of posing a danger to the entire Muslim world, likened it to a dried and rotten tree, and promised that this tree 'will be eliminated by one storm.' It is not Ahmadinejad's style that is troubling, but rather what is behind it -- for the storm the President of Iran is promising might be a nuclear one.... Ahmadinejad's pronouncements might prove that there is not always quiet before a storm. The Iranian nation, which, for the most part, wants economic prosperity while adhering to national pride, might pay the price of its leaders' bragging and hatred if it does not come to its senses and work to replace the current regime."

2. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel's demands of Hamas ... are justified. Therefore Israel must not give up the opportunities to make these demands heard. They must be brought before Hamas leaders.... [But] if the statesmen fall silent, only the rockets and guns will speak."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The fact that the post-disengagement reality does not resemble the forecasts ought to prompt Olmert to rethink his political plans.... Nine months after disengagement, this pregnancy ended only in the birth of question marks."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (April 17): "The only candidates for replacing the Hamas government are the Fatah activists.... But the clear impression in the territories today is that the public will not let them do so."

Liberal columnist Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "We have an opportunity to turn Hamas's interests into part of the forces of order on the other side. This should be Israel's goal -- a sufficiently stable central government on the other side."

Block Quotes:

I. "When the Cannons Roar"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 17): "It would come as no surprise if officials in Jerusalem, Washington, and a number of the region's capitals were harboring hopes that the situation in Gaza would deteriorate to such a degree, that the population would tire of Hamas and reject it. That would be a dangerous game.... Israel's demands of Hamas -- to renounce terror, to act against the groups that persist in using it, to recognize Israel and respect existing agreements -- are justified. Therefore Israel must not give up the opportunities to make these demands heard. They must be brought before Hamas leaders, if not through direct contact -- then via foreign negotiation channels. If the statesmen fall silent, only the rockets and guns will speak."

II. "A Pregnancy That Ended Only in the Birth of Question Marks"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 16): "The fact that the post-disengagement reality does not resemble the forecasts ought to prompt Olmert to rethink his political plans. Will Israel truly be able to establish its border with the Palestinians unilaterally -- a border that will be accepted by neither them nor the international community? Will Israel be able to 'converge' into 'settlement blocs' on the West Bank and annex them? Who will finance this process, which is going to cost tens of billions of shekels and will not be perceived as a solution to anything? Who is going to prevent a tragic rift in the people? And what will be left of Palestine after an Israeli pseudo-withdrawal that will go hand in hand with a pseudo-annexation? Nine months after disengagement, this pregnancy ended

only in the birth of question marks."

III. "Rallying Around Hamas"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (April 17): "The only candidates for replacing the Hamas government are the Fatah activists, who might be able to find a way to regain control of the government. But the clear impression in the territories today is that the public will not let them do so. The large number of Hamas voters have been joined by many more whose support for Ismail Haniyeh, Mahmoud Zahar and their persecuted colleagues has only increased as a result of the pressure on the elected government, together with the Israeli bombings, the siege and the collective punishment. All this will only increase the hostility for and hatred of Fatah."

IV. "No To Toppling Hamas"

Liberal columnist Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 17): "We can presume that Hamas's strength in Palestinian society will not lessen if it becomes a heroic organization that sacrificed its rule on the altar of its determination to fight Israel. If Fatah returns to power in its stead, its chances of reining in Hamas or dismantling its terrorist infrastructure, will not increase but rather decrease. Once again, we will get a weakened Fatah that is forced to cope with an armed and strong opposition, with broad public support.... The type of pressure that Israel is applying is liable to completely collapse the infrastructure of the unsteady Palestinian regime, and then we will find ourselves in a Lebanon-like situation, only without a Syria that is capable of keeping order.... We have an opportunity to turn Hamas's interests into part of the forces of order on the other side. This should be Israel's goal -- a sufficiently stable central government on the other side, which finds quiet preferable to a state of warfare. It is not certain that toppling Hamas serves this goal. It could prove to be less a way of teaching the tiger a lesson, and more as releasing the tiger from the golden cage of government. And then it will be able to return to the chaos, where it is easier for it to run wild."

13. Jonathan Pollard:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "[Jonathan] Pollard's transgression pales in comparison to [Marwan] Barghouti's atrocities."

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Pollard will be released only by something that applies pressure to the Americans, so that they say: 'There is no choice.' Until then, it is all speculation."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Free Pollard, Not Barghouti"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 17): "According to persistent reports, a deal could be in the works to swap convicted American spy Jonathan Pollard for convicted Palestinian terrorist Marwan Barghouti.... The very perception of Barghouti as preferable to Hamas is inherently flawed. His rhetoric years ago may have been milder, but the deeds for which he was jailed superseded any purported moderation. And his newly restated aims and those of Hamas are all but indistinguishable. Israeli endeavors to tip Palestinian political scales can only aggravate a bad situation. Israel already burned its fingers with such meddling, ironically by encouraging the rise of Hamas in the late 1980s as a foil to Fatah.... Pollard's transgression pales in comparison to Barghouti's atrocities. Pollard leaked material to America's ally (Israel) about an enemy's (Iraq's) preparations against it. American counter-espionage

has incontrovertibly apprehended greater and more harmful spies, yet they weren't treated anywhere as harshly as Pollard. Jews are currently celebrating Pessah [Passover], the festival of freedom. There's no context more suitable for Israel's premier, in his upcoming Washington visit, to put liberating Pollard from bondage at the top of his priority list. This should be done because it is what Pollard deserves, with no strings attached -- and certainly not any strings connected to Barghouti."

II. "Jonathan Barghouti"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 17): "The Americans, as Golda Meir once said about others [the Israeli Black Panthers], are 'not nice at all' when it comes to the Pollard affair, and the death of the 'leading man' in this unfortunate affair, Caspar Weinberger, makes no difference. If there is no clear American interest in releasing Pollard, the chances are small that we will see Jonathan in our midst anytime soon. The chances are equally small that Barghouti will stroll through Nablus Gate [in the Old City of Jerusalem]. Pollard will be released only by something that applies pressure to the Americans, so that they say: 'There is no choice.' Until then, it is all speculation."

JONES